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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 002360

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/2019
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SUBJECT: TFH01: HONDURAS UPDATE FROM COLOMBIA

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) President Uribe met on July 20 with acting Honduran Foreign Minister Carlos Lopez and other representatives of the de facto Micheletti government. Lopez stirred controversy by telling Colombian media that Uribe had expressed sympathy with the Micheletti regime, but the GOC quickly clarified that it supported both the constitutional process in Honduras and the mediation process led by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. Uribe told the Ambassador on July 23 that the Hondurans had requested the meeting. Uribe said Lopez asserted that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was behind most of deposed President Zelaya's activities. Uribe added that he had stressed to Lopez Colombian opposition to extra-constitutional regime change and that he unsuccessfully tried to elicit ideas to resolve the presidential crisis from the delegation. The GOC was annoyed but unsurprised that the Hondurans had gone public with the elements of the meeting.
End Summary.

HONDURAN DELEGATION CLAIMS URIBE SUPPORT

12. (U) Colombian media reported on July 22 that President Uribe had met with acting Honduran Foreign Minister Carlos Lopez and other representatives of the de facto Micheletti government in Bogota on July 20. Hours later, Lopez caused a stir by saying in a Colombian radio interview that Uribe had expressed "sympathy" for the Micheletti regime and that the Honduran delegation had come because they see both Honduras and Colombia as victims of external aggressors like Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. The GOC quickly distanced itself from Lopez's comments, stressing that the meeting was "informal" and took place in the context of the mediation process led by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. The GOC added that it did not endorse Lopez's statements about "third countries."

URIBE SAYS HE IS JUST LISTENING--LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS

13. (C) President Uribe told the Ambassador on July 23 that the Micheletti regime had approached the GOC a few days before the meeting to request the meeting. German Castaneda of the Colombian MFA told us separately that the GOC believed the Hondurans were testing the diplomatic waters by seeking support from regional governments they believed might be sympathetic to their cause--or at least hostile to Chavez.

Uribe said Lopez asserted during the meeting that Chavez was behind most of the external and internal machinations around Zelaya and was providing Zelaya with significant resources and assistance. Lopez concluded that the Hondurans were seriously worried about this role, and Uribe said he expressed a similar worry. (Note: Venezuelan Archbishop of Merida Baltazar Porras, a friend of the Honduran Cardinal, also told the Ambassador that Chavez was involved and was playing a destabilizing role. End Note). Uribe told the Hondurans he was sympathetic to their decision to remove Zelaya from office, but was not sympathetic to their having done so by extra-constitutional means.

¶4. (C) Uribe recounted that he asked the delegation if there was any solution that could involve Zelaya returning to Honduras. They could not guarantee that the Honduran legal system would not prosecute Zelaya for constitutional and legal offenses if he came back. Uribe probed them on whether the possibility existed to seat a president who was neither Zelaya nor Micheletti, but the Lopez delegation stated emphatically that in the absence of a constitutional vice-president, Micheletti was next in line for the office. Uribe called President Arias on July 21 and briefed him on the conversation. The Ambassador asked if Uribe had any of his own ideas on how to break the logjam; he had none.

GOC NOT PLEASED WITH HONDURAN DIPLOMACY

¶5. (C) Presidential Communications Director Jorge Mario Eastman told us on July 24 that the GOC was extremely annoyed with Lopez and the Honduran delegation for going public with the contents of what was supposed to be an informal private discussion. He said the GOC had tried to keep the meetings quiet out of a desire for discretion, not secrecy, but conceded that President Uribe had been somewhat "naive" to believe the Hondurans would refrain from trying to use the meetings to generate public support. Eastman reiterated the GOC's public statements opposing extra-constitutional regime changes. He also recognized that Arias' stature in the region gave the GOC--and other countries--little choice but to support his efforts.

Brownfield